

MEMORIAL  
OF THE  
LEGISLATURE OF MISSOURI,  
IN RELATION

*To the swamp lands in the southeastern part of Missouri and the north-eastern part of Arkansas.*

FEBRUARY 16, 1849.

Ordered to lie on the table, and be printed.

MEMORIAL concerning the swamp lands in Southeastern Missouri and Northeastern Arkansas.

*To the honorable Congress of the United States :*

Your memorialists, the General Assembly of the State of Missouri, would respectfully again call the attention of your honorable body, and urge upon you the propriety and necessity of immediate legislation on the subject of making some disposition of the swamp and submerged lands situated in Southeastern Missouri and Northeastern Arkansas, with a view to their speedy reclamation. If your memorialists appear to be importunate on this subject, it is because of its vast importance to a great extent of country and a numerous and enterprising population, whose interests are deeply affected by the presence of an intolerable nuisance in their midst, which only the action of Congress can effectually remove.

The subject has been so often brought to the attention of Congress in previous memorials from your memorialists, that they deem it unnecessary to go into a minute detail of the extent of country affected by the presence of these extensive swamps, and the evils seriously affecting the prosperity and happiness of a numerous and enterprising population, which they engender and diffuse. Your memorialists would respectfully refer you to these previous memorials. Suffice it to say, that this extensive swamp region embraces large portions of the counties of Cape Girardeau, Stoddard, Wayne, Dunklin, Scott, New Madrid and Mississippi, in the southeastern portion of Missouri, and, as they are informed, an extent of country equally great in the northeastern portion of the State of Arkansas; commencing immediately below the town of Cape Girardeau, in Cape Girardeau county, and running in a southwardly direction some two or three hundred miles, and connecting again directly with the Mississippi river at the mouth of the St. Francis river, a short distance above Helena, in Arkansas; in the meantime, throughout its whole course, being connected by a chain of lakes, bayous, glades, and lowlands, with extensive ranges of swamps of variable width and extent, embracing the

finest portions of the counties above named; some of which form the head waters of bayous which flow into the Mississippi and other streams. That through the heart of the main swamp flow the Little river, St. Francis and Black rivers, which, swollen by the annual rains and the accession of numerous tributaries from the adjacent elevated country, flood these swamps in consequence of obstructions in their channels, from rafts, fallen timber and other impediments occasioned by the great earthquakes of 1811 and 1812, and render the whole country impassable, and destroy extensive districts of country, embracing the finest lands in the world, which otherwise would be inhabited and cultivated by a dense and thriving population, and by the fatal malaria which is exhaled from them in the warm seasons, greatly affect the health of the adjacent country for hundreds of miles around. Contrary to the general character of the swamp country adjacent to the Mississippi river, these swamps, as strange as it may seem, with the exception of that portion of them in places in the immediate vicinity of the Mississippi river, are generally above the summit level of that great stream, from which they are divided by intervening ranges of more elevated lands, with the exception of their general course along the valley of the St. Francis river, along which their tendency is that of a justly inclined plane. Actual observation by patriotic and enterprising gentlemen has fully established these facts. The practicability therefore of reclaiming nearly the whole of this extensive and waste region to the plough, is at once deduced. The removal of the rafts and other obstruction in the beds of the St. Francis, Big Black and Little rivers, and main tributaries, and the cutting of a few short lateral canals to the Mississippi river, at certain points, and through certain glady and low lands to the heads of bayous, such as the St. John's in New Madrid, James's bayou, in Mississippi counties, would at once relieve this whole region of its immense surplus and redundant waters, and reclaim it to the arts of husbandry, reclaim the whole country in its vicinity from pestilence and disease, and invite a numerous, wealthy and industrious population to a country now a wilderness and a waste, and must ever continue so without the liberal and enlightened interposition of Congress. These, though of incalculable benefit, are not all the important results flowing from this measure. The Little river, St. Francis and Black rivers, must necessarily be rendered navigable for small class boats to a considerable extent in the interior, and thus open commercial communication with the great Father of Waters. Congress must at once see the great advantages of this result. Now they are locked up, and the unsurpassable obstacles interposed by the swamp region in its present condition, the inhabitants of a large district of country are almost literally cut off from all communication with the Mississippi for purposes of trade and commerce. Your memorialists embrace the entire swamp region, because whenever reclaimed, it must be done by a plan or system extending through their whole length and breadth, through both States of Arkansas and Missouri. It is estimated that some ninety-odd townships of unsurveyed lands lie within this swamp region, some forty-five of which are estimated to be within the limits of the State of Missouri. All this public land belongs to the United States. In their present condition, they are not only useless to the government, but are the source of an intolerable nuisance to a large portion of the people of the Union. Good government and the pressing interests of humanity demand that it should be

speedily removed. Your memorialists do not ask that the federal government shall undertake the work themselves. They may, as they conceive, have more important and pressing subjects before them commanding their attention ; we only ask that these lands shall be ceded to the States within which they lie, for the express purpose of their reclamation. They are now useless and must ever remain so, unless reclaimed by artificial means. It will, your memorialists are assured, not be too much to ask the cession of these lands for the expense and trouble of rendering them valuable, while they are persuaded that the patriotism and liberal and enlightened views of your honorable body cannot hesitate promptly to contribute thus much to the cause of humanity, when the extent of the evil to be remedied and the good to be done, at so little cost to government, are properly appreciated. And as in duty bound your memorialists will ever pray, &c.

Approved 24th January, 1849.

*Resolved by the Senate, (the House of Representatives concurring therein,) That the secretary of State be required to forward a copy of the memorial to Congress, concerning the swamp lands in Southeastern Missouri and Northeastern Arkansas, passed at the present session of the legislature, to each of our senators and representatives in Congress.*

JANUARY 26, 1849.

